

Message Text

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FM AMEMBASSY VIENTIANE
TO AMEMBASSY ROME
INFO AMEMBASSY TOKYO
SECSTATE WASHDC 6888

C O N F I D E N T I A L VIENTIANE 1996

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: JA PINR
SUBJECT: NEW JAPANESE AMBASSADOR TO THE VATICAN

REF: TOKYO 12491 (NOTAL)

1. KIYOSHI SUGANUMA SERVED AS JAPANESE AMBASSADOR TO LAOS FROM OCTOBER 25, 1973 TO JUNE 14, 1976, SERVING THROUGH THE PERIOD OF THE PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT OF NATIONAL UNION AND FOR SOME SIX MONTHS AFTER THE FORMATION OF THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF LAOS. HIS ASSIGNMENT HERE WAS AN IMPORTANT ONE SINCE JAPAN HAS BEEN THE LEADING NON-COMMUNIST CONTRIBUTOR OF ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE TO LAOS. JAPAN AND WEST GERMANY TOGETHER PROVIDED THROUGH THE ASIAN DEVELOPMENT BANK THE BULK OF THE 39 MILLION DOLLARS FOR PROJECT NAM NGUM II. ADDITIONALLY, JAPAN'S BILATERAL AID WAS ABOUT ONE MILLION DOLLARS IN 1976 AND EXPECTED TO REACH THREE MILLION DOLLARS IN 1977.

2. ALTHOUGH THE JAPANESE MAY ENTERTAIN SOME LONG TERM ECONOMIC INTEREST IN LAOS, THEY HAVE TOLD US HERE THAT THEIR MAIN MOTIVATION IN PROVIDING AID WAS TO MAINTAIN SOME MEASURE OF NON-COMMUNIST INFLUENCE IN LAOS. SUGANUMA APPEARED TO HANDLE THE JAPANESE AID PROGRAM RATHER SKILLFULLY DURING THE PAST YEAR, SPREADING OUT THE SIGNING OF DOCUMENTS AND THE PRESENTATION OF AID
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SHIPMENTS SO AS TO GET A FAIR AMOUNT OF PUBLICITY.

HOWEVER, HE DID NOT GET MUCH IN RETURN IN THE WAY OF GOOD WILL. THE LAO ORDERED JAPANESE VOLUNTEERS OUT OF THE COUNTRYSIDE LAST YEAR AND MAINTAINED A PRETTY HIGH LEVEL OF ANTI-JAPANESE PROPAGANDA, ACCUSING JAPAN OF COLLUSION WITH THE UNITED STATES AND OF ECONOMIC COLONIALISM.

3. SUGANUMA MAINTAINED A PRETTY LOW POSTURE BUT WAS NOT REPEAT NOT A "DOORMAT". ON ONE OCCASION WHEN A LAO OFFICIAL WAS SINGING THE PRAISES OF THE SOVIET UNION AND ITS GREAT ROLE IN WORLD WAR II IN THE FAR EAST, SUGANUMA REPLIED "THEY NEVER BEAT US." WHEN THE LAO ASKED, "WHO DID BEAT YOU?", SUGANUMA REPLIED, "THE AMERICANS DID, AND ONLY AFTER THREE YEARS OF VERY HARD FIGHTING."

4. SUGANUMA OCCUPIED A NEWLY COMPLETED AND VERY ATTRACTIVE JAPANESE EMBASSY RESIDENCE ON THE BANK OF THE MEKONG AND HE AND HIS FRENCH-SPEAKING WIFE ENTERTAINED VERY GENEROUSLY WITH JAPANESE STYLE RECEPTIONS AND BOTH JAPANESE AND FRENCH STYLE DINNERS. HE AND HIS STAFF WERE ALWAYS FRIENDLY TO THE UNITED STATES AND TO INDIVIDUAL OFFICIAL AMERICANS HERE. DURING THE PERIOD BEFORE THE COMMUNIST TAKEOVER ON DECEMBER 2, 1975, SUGANUMA MAINTAINED CLOSE RELATIONS WITH FORMER PRIME MINISTER PRINCE SOUVANNA PHOUMA AND ACTUALLY INSTALLED IN HIS NEW RESIDENCE A "BRIDGE PLAYING ROOM" FOR ENTERTAINING SOUVANNA.

5. SUGANUMA PREFERS TO SPEAK FRENCH RATHER THAN ENGLISH AND ALTHOUGH I HAVE HAD MANY YEARS EXPERIENCE WITH FRENCH SPEAKING ASIANS, I MUST ADMIT THAT ONCE OR TWICE I FOUND HIM PRETTYHARD TO FOLLOW IN FRENCH.

6. I HAVE REPEATED THIS MESSAGE TO BANGKOK BECAUSE AMBASSADOR WHITEHOUSE, WHO KNEW SUGANUMA RATHER WELL, MAY HAVE SOME OBSERVATIONS TO OFFER.
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